

XXXVI.—*Letters, Extracts, and Notes.*

WE have received the following letters addressed to the Editors:—

SIRs,—Since the publication of my article in the April number of 'The Ibis' (above, p. 285), I have received some further notes on *Pitheophaga jefferyi* from Mr. Willoughby Lowe, communicated to him by Father Llanos, of Manila. It should, however, be understood that Father Llanos received his information from natives, and that it would be unwise to place too much reliance upon its exact accuracy.

“(1). The Eagle sent to London alive was captured in September 1908 by means of a snare.

“(2). The nests of the Eagle are made of small dry branches: they are neither very large nor deep. The sticks are firmly held together by the bird's own excrement. Ordinarily these Eagles lay four eggs, and incubation lasts about twenty-four days.

“(3). The usual food of these Eagles is fish, which is captured along the sea-shore, but they also eat hogs, monkeys, cats, &c.

“(4). Their resort is generally near the shore, in the high rocks and crags.

“(5). After making the nest and during incubation and the rearing of their young they are very fierce; they attack and kill anything that approaches.

“(6). The place in Mindanao where this bird was captured is called 'Sandag, Sarigas.'

“(7). A little time after its capture a snare was laid in the same manner as before, and there came its mate, which must have been the male bird and much larger in size, and, seizing the bait, gave a strong tug, and broke the cord which held the snare, and escaped.”

The last paragraph in these notes would seem to throw some doubt on my statement that the specimen recently possessed by the Zoological Society was a female.

My own impression, and that of several others, was that our bird was a male, this opinion being based on the fact that it was practically identical in size with Whitehead's type-specimen (now in the British Museum), which was sexed as a male.

When our bird died it was immediately taken to the Prosectorium, and its entrails were removed for examination by the Pathologist. The latter's assistant assured me that he carefully examined the bird, and that it was unquestionably a *female*; hence the statement in my recent paper. In the light of the notes above given, however, I am much inclined to think that a mistake was made, and that our bird was a male, as at first supposed. Further material will doubtless throw light on this point.

I am, Sirs, yours &c.,

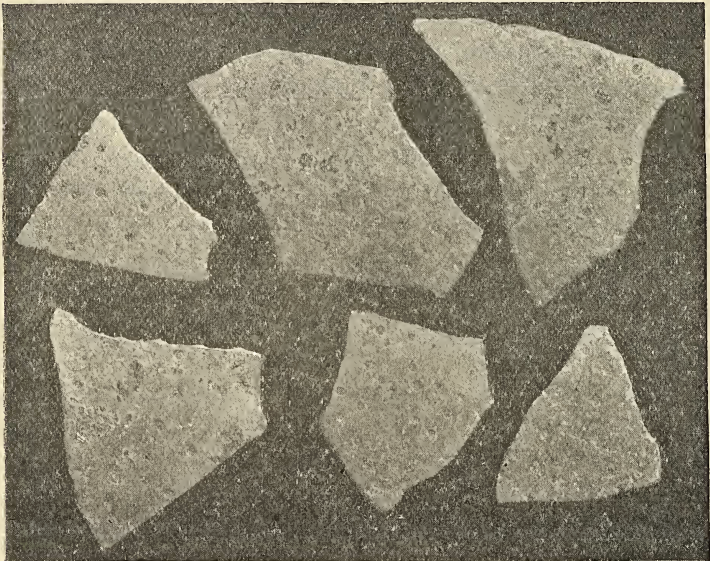
Zoological Society's Gardens,
June 3rd, 1910.

D. SETH-SMITH.

SIRS,—In May 1905 I exhibited at the meeting of the British Ornithologists' Club (see Bull. vol. xv. p. 72) some fragments of fossil egg-shell which had been obtained by the late Mr. Archibald Carlyle when engaged on the Archaeological Survey of India. When I purchased them at Stevens's Auction Rooms these fragments were in a small tin box bearing a label "Fossil Egg Shell? Nullas, Kain River, Banda." Mr. W. P. Pycraft supplemented my remarks by a short account of the result of a microscopical examination of the shell, which appeared to be undoubtedly a fragment of the egg-shell of a Struthious bird akin to the modern Ostriches (*Struthio*). Quite recently Dr. C. W. Andrews, F.R.S., has been working on some fossil eggs of Struthious birds, and from his microscopical examination of these fragments has come to the conclusion that they are parts of an egg of a species of *Struthio*, and that in the distribution of the pores on the surface of the shell they are almost identical with eggs of the Somaliland Ostrich (*Struthio molybdophanes*), although possibly the shell is

rather thicker than that of any recent Ostrich-egg which has been measured. The Ken or Kain River is a tributary of the Jumna and Banda, in the United Provinces to the south-west of Allahabad. As in recent times no Struthious bird has been known in India, I think it important to place the result of Dr. Andrews's examination on record, and for the sake of reference propose to call the species *Struthio indicus*.

Text-fig. 7.



Fragments of Egg-shell of Indian Ostrich.

The smallest of the seven fragments of shell was sacrificed for the microscopical examination; the photograph (taken to scale) of the other six well shews the arrangement of the pores.

That these fragments may be available for comparison, I have given the box and three of them to the Natural History Museum, two to the Hon. Walter Rothschild for the Tring Museum, and the other I am sending to the Calcutta Museum.

I trust that this small matter may direct the attention of

Indian palæontologists to the importance of keeping a good look out for the fossil remains of this group of birds.

Yours &c.,

EDWARD BIDWELL.

SIRS,—My collector, Mr. J. P. Rogers, has sent me from the Tinami Gold Fields, Northern Territory, a skin of *Aphelocephala nigricincta* (Mathews, Hand-l. B. Austral. p. 87), which he obtained on March 27th, 1910. This locality is 700 miles north of Missionary Plains, Maedonald Ranges, Central Australia, where the type of the species was obtained by Mr. G. A. Kearland.

Mr. A. J. North described this bird as *Xerophila nigricincta* in 'The Ibis' of 1895 (p. 340). He also figured it in the 'Report of the Horn Scientific Expedition,' Aves, plate vii. (1896). The nests and eggs are described in the same Report (p. 83).

This is the first record of this species since it was described fifteen years ago, and it is also from a new locality.

The soft parts are: "Bill leaden-brown; iris white; feet and tarsi leaden-blue."

The stomach contained fragments of beetles and seeds, as well as a little grit.

I am, Sirs, yours &c.,

Langley Mount,
Watford,

GREGORY M. MATHEWS.

August 3rd, 1910.

SIRS,—Readers of 'The Ibis' will, I think, be interested to know that in our lagoons last spring was shot an adult female of the Shoveller (*Spatula clypeata*) wholly white. This bird was seen for several days on the wing at all hours, beating up and down over the large salt-marshes which lie in the Province of Padua; but, owing to its excessive shyness, it was always far out of shot, and people were unable to secure it. But on the morning of 14th of March last an ardent sportsman, Dr. Albert Guillion Mangilli, had the good fortune to kill it in the Valle Sacche di Millecampi. It is a rather

small female; the wing is less than 9 inches. The soft parts are coloured as follows:—Bill dirty orange-yellow; eyes bright yellow; legs, toes, and webs orange. It is silvery white on the head and neck, a little shaded with yellowish on the rest of the body.

I think this variety is very scarce, and do not remember to have seen such a specimen in any collection.

I take the opportunity to state that in the Collection Contarini (at Venice) there is an example of the very rare cross between the Mallard and the Shoveller, the only one, I believe, preserved in our collections. It is a male, very well characterised, shot in the wild state on the lagoons of Venice more than sixty years ago, not well stuffed, but very well preserved, so that it would be opportune to make it up again. The bill is not so broad as in *Spatula clypeata*, and it has the green of the head and neck, shoulder and back of *Anas boscas*, but it wants the posterior black band. The comb-like teeth are much less developed than in the Shoveller and the feet are smaller than those of the Wild Duck.

The Mallard is common in winter and breeds occasionally with us. The Shoveller does not breed in Italy; it is abundant enough in winter and on passage, particularly during the spring migration, but it appears to be somewhat local in its distribution, and is more particularly a freshwater Duck.

Yours &c.,

Count E. ARRIGONI DEGLI ODDI.

Ca' Oddo (Monselice-Padova),

July 31st, 1910.

Progress of the Expedition of the B.O.U. into Central New Guinea *.—The latest letters received from Mr. Goodfellow and the other members of the B.O.U. expedition to New Guinea are dated June 4th. Up to that time we are sorry to say little further progress had been made. This was mainly owing to the great difficulties experienced in conveying the stores from the base camp at Wakatimi on the Mimika

* For previous notices on this subject, see 'Ibis,' 1898, Jub. Suppl. p. 12; 'Ibis,' 1909, pp. 194, 715; 'Ibis,' 1910, pp. 223, 377, 570.

River to the new camp at Toupoué at the foot of the snow-mountains.

In one of his last letters Mr. Goodfellow writes :—

“ It may seem to you that so far we have progressed very little. In a sense this is true, but I must tell you that at home it is impossible to realize the impassable nature of the country and the difficulties which have to be overcome. This part of the coast was entirely unknown, but it was supposed that the mouth of the Mimika was the best place to land at, and that this river came from the highest snow-mountains. We now know that such is not the case. All the rivers on this part of the coast, though they come from an easterly

Text-fig. 8.



Outline Map of part of New Guinea coast near the Mimika River.

direction, turn away to the west in the interior, so that the highest part of the snow-range lies far east of the headwaters of the Mimika. There is no doubt whatever that the Oetakwa River drains the water from the snows of Carstensz Peak. Looking at that mountain from the sea you would think that it lay directly behind the Mimika River; but, as we now know, it is nearly fifty miles off along the base of the range, and there are many big rivers to be crossed before we get to it.

“ It is, of course, quite impossible, now that such an extensive settlement has been made at Wakatimi, to change our route, so we shall be obliged to go overland from our camp at Toupoué. Dr. Marshall is now engaged in cutting a trail from there to the first big river—the Kamura,—and we have a large canoe on that river ready to ferry us over. Some of us have explored the country for a long way to the east of that river, so that we now know exactly where we have to go.”

Mr. Shortridge, whose first collections have arrived in England and are now under examination, has been suffering much from fever, and has been obliged to go to New South Wales for a few months to recruit his health. Mr. Claude Grant, who has been sent out to take the late Mr. Stalker's place, left England on June 18th, and will pick up at Singapore two well-trained Dyak collectors, whose services have been kindly lent to the Committee by Mr. H. C. Robinson, the Director of the Kuala-Lumpur Museum.

During the months of April and May Mr. Goodfellow was chiefly engaged in obtaining a permanent staff of coolies and in superintending the movement of the stores. Mr. Woolaston passed most of the time in charge of the base-camp at Wakatimi, making occasional visits to Toupoué, which was the headquarters of Mr. Shortridge, Captain Rawling, and Dr. Marshall. The camp there is a far healthier spot than Wakatimi, the water being clear, while at the mouth of the river it is foul and muddy.

With great satisfaction the Committee are able to announce that the Government have agreed to support the Expedition by making a grant in aid of its Funds of £4000. This is most gratifying, as indicating not only a recognition of the importance of the undertaking, but also a welcome sympathy with its objects.

Adding the amount raised by private subscriptions (about £4500) the Committee will thus have £8500 at their disposal. But further assistance will be gratefully received by the Treasurer (Mr. Fagan), in order to carry on the exploration

of the unknown highlands of New Guinea for as long a time as possible.

Habits of the Honey-Guides.—In Col. Patterson's recently published volume 'In the Grip of the Nyika' we read (p. 223) as follows:—

"As we were marching quietly along soon after leaving Kurseine, my guide, Papai, suddenly showed signs of great excitement, and drew our attention to a tiny bird, fluttering and twittering in front of us in a very curious fashion. On asking him through Abudi what its antics meant, he replied 'He is telling us where to get honey.' I was naturally very much interested, and when Papai asked me if I would halt the *safari* for a little, so that he might go and rob the nest, I willingly consented and myself accompanied him, who now relinquished to the tiny bird his *rôle* of guide. The little thing, which was barely the size of a Wren, twittered and chirruped and fluttered along from one bush to another, looking round pertly all the time to see if we were following. In this way it led us on for about a quarter of a mile, until at last it came to a dead stop, and took up its position on a tree, where it remained motionless.

"Papai then told us that we were now close to the honey, and must be on the look-out for the bees coming and going. In a few seconds we discovered them entering a tiny hole in a tree not a dozen yards from where our cunning little guide had stopped.

"We very soon had an opening made sufficiently large for Papai to thrust his hand into the hollow, and in this way he removed several honeycombs full of the most delicious golden honey. He took not the slightest notice of the bees, though they flew all round him, and some of them stung him. We were much pleased with our spoil, and left a fair share of it behind as a reward for the trusty little bird who had led us along so skilfully."

Birds of North-east Greenland.—In Dr. J. Lindhard's account of the Danish Expedition to N.E. Greenland of 1906–8 (Geogr. Journ. xxxv. p. 541) we are told that the "ornithological booty of the Expedition was unexpectedly abundant." Particular attention was paid to the breeding-places of such species as *Tringa canutus*, *Calidris arenaria*, *Phalaropus fulicarius*, *Larus sabinii*, *L. eburneus*, *Anser leucopsis*, and *Somateria spectabilis*. Of all these species specimens not only of full-grown birds, but also of eggs and of young in different stages of development were procured. Of *Calidris arenaria* 24 eggs were obtained, and a breeding-place of thirty pairs of *Tringa canutus* was discovered. A specimen of *Fuligula marila*, a species new to Greenland, was brought home.

New Work on Australian Birds.—Many of our readers are already, no doubt, aware that Mr. Gregory M. Mathews, M.B.O.U., has undertaken the important task of preparing a new illustrated work on the Birds of Australia. By the prospectus, just received, we are informed that the first part of it will be published in November next by Messrs. Witherby and Co. Mr. Mathews, who has lived all his life in Australia, and has been a close student of its bird-life for many years, is well qualified for this arduous piece of work, concerning which full particulars are given in the prospectus. As planned it will consist of eight volumes in royal quarto, with coloured figures of every species.

Departure of Mr. Robinson.—Mr. Herbert C. Robinson, Director of the Museums of the Federated Malay States, who has been in England during the past summer, sails for the East again by the 'Mongolia' on Oct. 7th, to take up his former position. He is planning an exploration of the high mountains of Central Sumatra, which he believes have hardly been touched by Ornithologists, and are likely to produce birds not found in the lower districts. If all goes well he hopes to be able to start on his expedition in April next year.